Design Resource

Conch Shell Bangles - Kolkata

Engraving Art

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Srikanth B.
NID, Bengaluru

Source:
https://dsource.in/resource/conch-shell-bangles-kolkata

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
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Introduction

Conch is a generic name for all types and sizes of shells obtained from the sea. This sea-dwelling mollusk bears a powerful symbolism in every religion. Hence its application in various forms is found since the ancient period till present civilization. In the world, the majority of conches are found in Indo pacific oceans, especially in the Caribbean region. Here while the queen conches are found in the seagrass spread in their beds, other types are usually formed in warm tropic water.

Tracing back to history, conch has been used in parts of Asia for decoration in religious ceremonies. Evidence of its usage as containers for auspicious oils and medicines during the Indus Valley Civilization was found from various sites. In Tibet, while the shells are blown in Buddhist rituals, in Japan, it is used for spiritual purposes, and Korea for military fanfares. According to legends, India has specialized in trumpet and original horn making since 2000 years back. Hence these products and many other conch shells by-products were exported to Egypt, Greece, and other parts of the world. Now, conch shell business is majorly practiced in Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Mysore, Bellary, Anantapur, Hyderabad, Kathiawar, Kuddapa, and Kurnool. It is believed that a natural vibration inside the shell creates a gentle humming sound that can be heard when placed close to one's ear. Hindus consider this to be their sacred syllable 'Aum'.

Due to its immense availability, creativity stroke it in the form of crafting, a designing method practiced in India for ages. They are thus used in the making of artistic utility items like decorative products, jewelry, religious instruments and are also suitable for load-bearing ceramics, building construction, aerospace engineering, and computer industry applications. The powdered form of these shells is used as color as well as an ingredient in certain medicines. Due to the queen shell's property of strength and thickness that is almost 1000 times than other varieties, wide application of the material is seen in the construction field. On the religious front, the jewelry collection from the type includes varieties of necklaces, clips, bracelets, bangles, etc. Lokenath Sankha Shilpagar is a place where conch shell bangles are made. Artisans from this factory carve intricate designs on bangles to keep this traditional art alive.

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A board with the name of the shop "Lokenath Sankha Shilpagar", located at Ghushipara Road, Barrackpore, Kolkata.

Mr. Partha Dhar, a senior artisan of conch bangles.

The work area where conch bangles are made.

An artisan displaying finished conch bangles.

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Raw conchs aligned on a floor.

Conch bangles packed to be supplied to retailers.

Conch bangles in different forms.

Artisans are involved in the polishing process.

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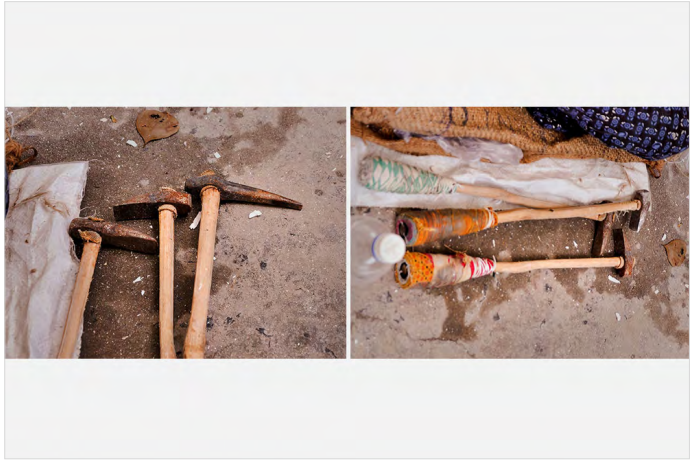
Tools and Raw Materials

The following are the tools and raw materials used for making conch shell bangles:

- **Conch Shell:** It is the primary element used for bangle making.
- **Hammer:** It is used for breaking the shell.
- **Cutting Machine:** It is used for cutting the shells into required shapes and sizes.
- **Grinding Machine:** It is used to grind and polish the upper part of the conch.
- **Chisel:** It is used for carving the conch shell.
- **Designing Machine:** It is used for intricate cutting the shell.
- **Wax:** It is used for filling up the hollow areas in the shell.



The long hammer used in breaking the conch.

The rubbing machines used in the conch bangle making.

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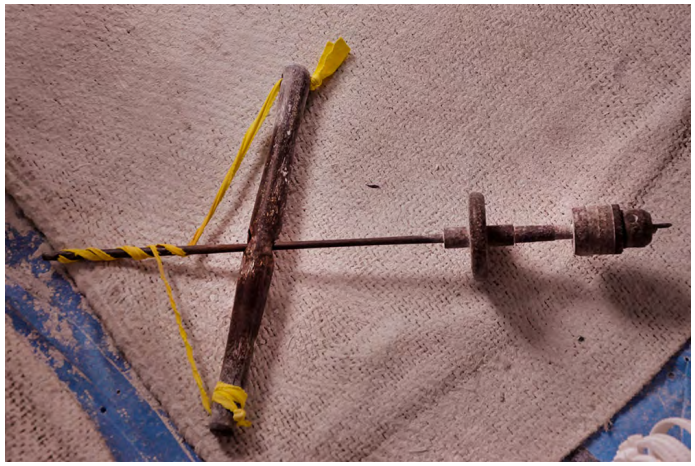

The manual drilling machine.

Brown colored Florida fighting conch shells.

The banded tulip conches.

Water and a bucket were used to wash the conch shells.

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The cutting machine is used to cut the shells into ring shapes.

Sharpening stone to sharpen the blades.

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Making Process

Traditionally, the artisans involved in conch bangle making are popularly known as 'Sankhari'. Here their main goal goes into making conch bangles. The conch bangles are made in a step-by-step manner like as follows: Firstly, the front area of the shell is removed from the shell using a process named 'Bhanga'. Once separated, the inner area of the shell is pierced, making a hole. This step is called 'Phura'. After, 'Phura' comes 'Genra', which involves a cleaning process where the body of the snail residing inside the shell is removed and dipped in water for a couple of days to attain a soft texture to work on. In this solution, some amount of citric acid is also added to whiten the shells. These shells are then dried in the hot sun. Later, a perfect set of conch shells are separated and broken into two pieces from the middle. This attained particular part usually comes in a roughly round shape, which is then perfected using a grinding machine. The process of cutting conch is known as 'Malui Daga' or 'Majar'. The polishing of the upper layer also takes place at this stage. It is followed by 'Rekh Kata' where the Majar is cut into several pieces, giving at least 3 to 5 bangles from one conch shell. Designs and patterns are engraved on these plain white conch bangles using a chisel and designing machines. Motifs ranging from flowers, leaves, animals, deities to historical images are used to embellish the ornament. As a final stage, the semi-finished bangles are polished by heating and applying nitric acid. In case defective bangles are spotted at this final stage, they are repaired using lac, zinc oxide, coal, wax, and wood.

Artisan cutting the conch shells using a mechanical blade.

Artisan hitting the conch shells with a hammer to remove the cut parts.

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A set of broken conch pieces.

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Artisan removing extra parts of conch.

Artisan cutting thin pieces of the conch for the bangle making.

Conch shells cut into a bangle shape.

A ring shape made out of conch.

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Artisan working on the conch shell rings for the bangles.

Artisan drawing designs over the bangle surface with a pencil.

Artisan involved in the conch bangle making process.

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Artisan involved in the conch bangle making process.

Artisan making carvings on the bangles using a drilling tool.

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Different varieties of conch bangles on display.

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Products

Conch shells are not only used for making bangles but also for pendants, bracelets, rings, hairpins, etc. These products bear engravings that are of twenty-five types. Hence its production is a unique affair. Here the common motifs used are jasmine flower, lily flower, buds, etc. At this Kolkata-based handicrafts center, the conch products' price is fixed as per the size, design, color, and quality of the conch shells. Thus the cost of standard size conch bangle is set at INR. 300.

Beautiful conch bangles on display.

Artisan presenting a beautiful conch bangles bunch.

A Sage impression statue and flower designs are carved on the conch surface.

Flower design carved on conch surfaces.

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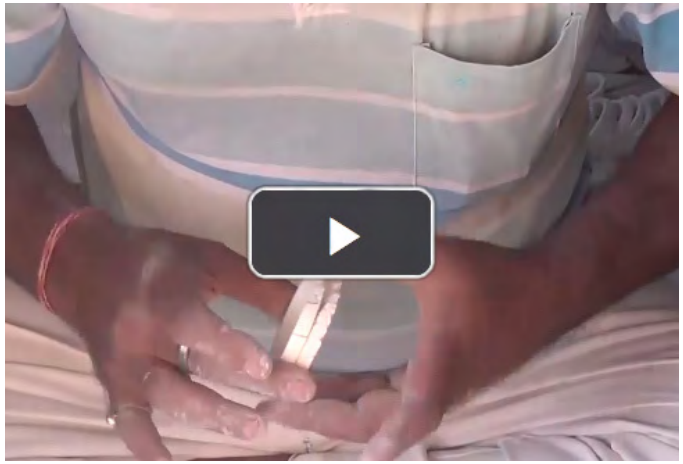
Video



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